(d) Market promotion measures abroad and product development efforts to make Indian gem and jewellery products competitive in world markets have helped in increasing exports and these measures are proposed to be continued and intensified, wherever required.

Irregular Foreign Exchange Transactions by Foreign Missionaries

4905. SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether any foreign missionaries have been apprehended during the current year for their involvement in irregular foreign exchange transactions; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI RAMESHWAR THAKUR): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

Trade and Economic Cooperation with ASEAN

4906 SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India is working in close co-operation with Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia Pacific Run trade blocks for improving its trading and economic co-operation with these countries;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI SALMAN KHURSHEED): (a) to (c). The Government has expressed interest in becoming a sectoral dialogue partner with ASEAN in four fields viz. trade, tourism human resource development and science and technology.

Government has also flagged its interest in having association with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Grouping.

Financial Assistance to Bihar

4907. SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Union Government propose to given more financial assistance to Bihar to enable it to overcome its difficult economic situation;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SHANTARAM POTDUKHE): (a) to (c). Usual flow of funds on account of share in Central Taxes, Central assistance for State Plan schemes, Small Savings loan, Revenue Deficit grant, Centre's contribution to State Calamity Relief Fund and Centrally sponsored schemes is being made to the State. Whenever necessary, some advance releases of State's entitlements will also be made to help the State tide over their temporary Ways and Means difficulties. No other type of assistance is proposed to be given to the State during the current financial years.

Alleged Fraud in UCO Bank, Chandigarh

4908. SHRI SHRAVAN KUMAR PATEL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state: